

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARK'S RC (VA) PRIMARY SCHOOL

Westerhope, Newcastle upon Tyne

LEA area: Newcastle

Unique reference number: 108498

Headteacher: Mrs A Gawthorpe

Reporting inspector: Fran Gillam
21498

Dates of inspection: 14th – 15th October 2002

Inspection number: 246799

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant and junior
School category:	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils:	4 – 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Bardon Close Westerhope Newcastle upon Tyne
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M Thompson
Date of previous inspection:	12 th – 15 th January 1998

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	11
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	16
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	18
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	19

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Mark's is a smaller than average primary school on the edge of the Newbiggin Hall housing estate in Newcastle. It is a Catholic voluntary aided school; approximately 50 per cent of the children come from non-catholic backgrounds. There are 192 pupils on roll, with 102 boys and 90 girls. Thirty children attend full time in the Reception class. The children's attainment when they start school is below that expected for their age. There are seven classes, all with a single age range. All but a few of the pupils are from a white British background. About four per cent of the pupils are from other ethnic backgrounds. Almost all of these pupils speak English fluently. A small number of pupils have refugee status and speak Czechoslovakian or Farsi as their home language. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is 24 per cent, which is about average. There are 11 per cent of pupils with special educational needs, which is below average. St Mark's is in the Newcastle Education Action Zone (EAZ). In the last two years, the school has had a high turnover of teaching staff. This has equated to 18 changes in teachers. This has been mainly due to staff being successful in seeking promotion.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Mark's is a good school with some very good features; standards have risen faster than those nationally. Pupils have very good attitudes towards their schoolwork because they enjoy their lessons and the teachers expect them to work hard. Pupils do well during their time in the school because of the good teaching. Standards in the present Year 6 are above average in mathematics and science, and average in English. The headteacher gives good leadership; she has managed the school well during the period of staff changes. The senior managers and governors support the work of the school; they have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to help the school improve even further. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils throughout the school do well in mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) because teaching is effective.
- Pupils do well by Year 2 in English; the basic skills are taught thoroughly.
- Pupils enjoy school, behave very well and build very effective relationships with each other and the staff.
- The rich and varied curriculum is a significant reason why pupils enjoy school and are interested in their lessons.
- Parents are very pleased with the way the school helps their children to mature and improve.

What could be improved

- Standards in writing by the end of Year 6.
- The provision for children in the Foundation Stage¹.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the last inspection in January 1998 the school has made good improvement. Standards have risen faster than those nationally over the past three years, although there was a fall in English standards in 2002. The increased resources for ICT have given staff and pupils greater access to equipment such as computers and digital cameras. Funding from the EAZ has been used wisely to set up a computer suite and to provide teaching aids such as interactive whiteboards² to support teaching and learning. Staff training has been effective and shows in the good achievement of the pupils and the higher standards in ICT than at the time of the last inspection.

The arrangements to check how well pupils are doing are better than they were. However, these could be more rigorous to ensure consistency, for example, in teachers' marking and in analysing pupils' writing to check they are making enough progress over time. Governors now have a more active involvement in making decisions;

¹ The stage of learning for children aged three to six years.

² Large boards that are used to project information from computer screens and also to write upon, which teachers and pupils can use to show, for example, mathematical calculations, sentences or phrases.

they now have a satisfactory understanding of how successful these decisions have been in raising standards further. The school is well placed to improve even further.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 6 based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
English	B	A	C	A
Mathematics	C	B	A	A*
Science	C	A*	A	A*

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Standards in the tests in 2002 were well above average in mathematics and science and average in English. Importantly, St Mark's did very much better in mathematics and science and much better in English than schools with similar circumstances. Standards in English fell last year because no pupils attained above the expected level for their age in writing. Standards in the present Year 6 are above average in mathematics and science; they are average in English. Already in mathematics and science, most higher and average attaining pupils are working at the level expected by the end of Year 6 rather than at the start of the year. The added emphasis, throughout the school, on developing pupils' mental mathematical skills reflects in the higher standards in the tests in 2002. Pupils achieve well in mathematics from Year 1 to Year 6. The strong emphasis placed upon developing pupils' scientific knowledge and understanding through carrying out experiments and investigations contributes well to the standards by Year 6 and the good progress pupils make throughout the school. Standards are average in English by Year 6 but pupils' writing skills do not develop as quickly in Years 3 to 6 as they do in Years 1 and 2. By Year 2, standards are above average in reading and writing, and pupils achieve well in Years 1 and 2 because literacy skills are consolidated well. In Years 3 to 6 the pupils make satisfactory progress in writing. Even though pupils in Years 3 to 6 have some good opportunities to write for different reasons, they still need more practice to develop their writing further and secure higher standards. The pupils achieve well in ICT and standards by Year 6 are in line with those expected for eleven year olds. There is a good emphasis upon developing skills in using computers and pupils have a clear understanding of the use of different types of technology in use at school and in the wider world. When children start school in the Reception class, attainment is below that expected for their age; this is evident in the present group of children in their personal and social and mathematical development, as well as in communication, language and literacy. Their achievement is satisfactory overall but should be better, particularly in personal and social and mathematical development. The children's progress is slower here because they have too few opportunities to develop their understanding and skills through finding and trying things out for themselves. Pupils with special educational needs do well because they have good support in lessons to help them with their understanding. Pupils with English as an additional language make good gains in the acquisition of English; their full involvement in lessons speeds their progress.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good – pupils are enthusiastic in lessons and this shows in their interest level and the way they work hard and try their best.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good – pupils behave very well because they know what is expected from them. They know their efforts will be valued and recognised.
Personal development and relationships	Very good – older pupils take on responsibility particularly well. Pupils develop very good relationships with each other; they work and play

	together constructively.
Attendance	Good – the rate of attendance is above that nationally; pupils like school.

The pupils appreciate their friends and enjoy the activities the school provides for them. These activities have a strong influence upon why pupils enjoy school so much.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Good	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching is good in Years 1 to 6, particularly in ensuring that pupils develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills to support their work across the curriculum. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 pick up skills well because teaching provides time for repetition and practice to consolidate learning. Throughout the school, teachers' explanations are clear and provide pupils with a good starting point for further work. This means that pupils and teachers use time well to extend learning and develop ideas. It also leads to pupils being interested in what they are learning and helps them to concentrate on their work. In lessons, teachers provide an efficient balance of whole class discussions, group and individual work, which allows them to involve pupils of different abilities successfully. Support for pupils with special educational needs is effective because these pupils do not struggle with their work. The mixture of well-planned work and extra help ensures that these pupils develop their knowledge and understanding well. Effective help for pupils whose first language is not English ensures full participation in lessons. This was evident in a mathematics lesson in Year 5 where a pupil answered questions confidently. Timely intervention from learning support staff ensured that the pupil was able to try out his answer first. This gave the pupil the courage to speak up and show how well he could do. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly but there is variation in the quality of the marking in Years 3 to 6. For example, in literacy some teachers provide useful pointers for the lower attaining pupils to help them improve their work but others do not. Often the marking praises pupils for their efforts without pointing out how they could do even better. This leads to errors recurring in pupils' work and some skills in writing not being consolidated as well as they could. In the Reception class, activities interest the children but sometimes the way they are organised reduces the chances for children to learn through trying things out for themselves.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good – the activities are relevant to the ages and interests of the pupils. Pupils have a very wide and varied range of activities to choose from outside lessons.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good – support for pupils focuses well upon their needs. Additional support to help them develop literacy and numeracy skills is successful.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good – the help these pupils receive ensures they are fully involved and can take part in lessons. They are acquiring English quickly and the confidence to speak out in class.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good – the school provides a good range of opportunities for pupils to develop their personal skills. Sporting activities and chances to work together in class enable pupils to develop a very good understanding of how to work and play together constructively. There is a warm and caring atmosphere; staff encourage pupils to think about those less fortunate than themselves and successfully promote a respect for peoples of different backgrounds and beliefs.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good – staff care for pupils very well, and they respond quickly to any problems that may arise. Child protection procedures are in place. Arrangements for checking how well pupils are doing provide a useful guide for teaching and learning.

Excellent links with outside bodies such as local sports teams increase the chances for pupils to take part in sports such as rugby, basketball and hockey. The pupils enjoy these chances; they have provided a spur to many pupils to take up sport out of school. St Mark's has received an Activemark Award from Sport England reflecting the success of their provision for pupils' physical development. At present, the curriculum for the Reception year does not have a strong enough emphasis upon developing children's personal and social skills in lessons, for example, through opportunities to explore and try out their ideas.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good – the headteacher has managed the school well during the period of staff changes. The staff work well as a team and co-ordinators are clear about their roles and responsibilities.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactorily – there have been a number of changes to the governing body since the last inspection. The governors understand the challenges facing the school and fulfil their roles and responsibilities as expected.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory – the analysis of standards is firmly in place and this information is used to inform school improvement successfully. However, the evaluation of pupils' written work is not wide ranging enough to check for consistency in teaching and learning across year groups.
The strategic use of resources	Good – the school makes good use of funding and grants to support pupils' learning further. Examples are grants from the EAZ to set up the computer suite as well as sports' coaching provided with funds from the Sports Council.

The school regularly consults parents and pupils. For example, pupils, through the school council, have requested additional play equipment and made suggestions regarding the wildlife garden. Pupils feel they are listened to, as do their parents. The school compares its standards with all schools and those with similar backgrounds and uses this information successfully to check how well it is doing. This brought about improvements in the standards in mathematics last year because of a stronger focus upon developing mental mathematics skills.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like coming to school. • Behaviour in the school is good. • The teaching is good. • The school is helping their children to become mature and responsible. • They feel comfortable approaching the school with any suggestions or concerns. • The school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being informed about how well their children are getting on.

There was a very good response to the parental questionnaire – 70 per cent of parents replied. Parents are very pleased with the work of the school. The team agrees with the positive views of parents but found no evidence to support their concerns. Parents receive regular and useful information about how well their children are doing.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils throughout the school do well in mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) because teaching is effective.

1. Teaching places a strong emphasis upon pupils developing their knowledge and understanding through practising and using skills to develop their ideas. This is a significant reason why pupils achieve as well as they do in mathematics, science and ICT throughout the school. Teachers make sure that there is an efficient balance between providing pupils with information, or showing them how to do things, with the pupils trying things out for themselves or solving problems.
2. In mathematics, pupils of all ages benefit from the regular practice of the mental recall of number facts. This builds pupils' confidence to tackle mathematical problems and to use a range of methods to calculate answers. In the younger classes, the emphasis upon practical activities helps pupils to recognise, for example, shapes as they handle and describe what they feel and see. For the lower attaining pupils in a Year 2 lesson, this proved to be very effective in helping them to talk and communicate their ideas, as well as developing their understanding of terms such as edges and corners. Throughout this lesson, teaching ensured that pupils of all abilities were catered for effectively through questions that challenged the higher and average attaining pupils and by focusing less complicated questions towards the lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. This ensured that a careful check was made of pupils' understanding and that expectations of the different groups of pupils were realistic.
3. Mental skills develop well throughout the school. Pupils learn quick and effective ways of calculating totals. For example, in Year 4, pupils were doubling numbers and then adding them together. They did this quickly and accurately. The teacher asked pupils to explain how they calculated the answers. A higher attaining pupil suggested that the two numbers could be added first and then doubled. For some pupils this proved a more effective means of finding the answer and ideas were shared very well as a result. This way of sharing ideas also worked effectively in a Year 5 lesson and had a particularly beneficial affect upon a pupil with English as an additional language. Support from the learning assistant, together with the sharing of ideas, allowed this pupil to accurately find the equivalent fractions for halves, quarters and thirds. In classes where there are interactive whiteboards, teachers make good use of them as a tool to show pupils how to set out their work, to pose problems and to allow all pupils to play a part. For example, in Year 6, pupils pitted themselves against a computer program that challenged them to find the multiples of numbers and to divide numbers quickly. The pupils thoroughly enjoyed this activity, especially when some of them were much quicker than the program. In mathematics lessons, learning is fun and pupils respond very well to the challenges set for them. The good balance of the mathematics curriculum ensures the pupils have a wide experience of number, shape and measures, and organising and interpreting mathematical information, and this results in the pupils' good achievement.
4. In science, teaching places a strong emphasis upon developing pupils' scientific knowledge and understanding through experimentation and investigation. This helps pupils to use the skills they have learned in meaningful ways and brings purpose to their learning. As in mathematics, the pupils experience a wide range of scientific experiences such as learning about how solids, liquids and gases behave, and how plants and animals reproduce. Teaching challenges pupils successfully and so they use scientific terminology consistently. By Year 6, the higher attaining pupils are using chemical symbols and explaining their findings using the correct scientific words. There are some good links with aspects of mathematics when pupils organise their findings in tables or in charts. This strengthens aspects of information handling and emphasises the purpose of the mathematical skills used. The average attaining and lower attaining pupils make particularly good progress because there is a careful matching of their

needs to the level of investigation. The quality of pupils' written work reflects the level of interest the pupils have for science. For example, much of the pupils' writing is their own account of what they saw and found out. Diagrams are clear and labelled correctly and communicate successfully the scientific learning that has taken place. The thorough teaching of scientific skills, knowledge and understanding is a strong reason why pupils do so well in science by Year 6.

5. In ICT, pupils are confident to use computers, for example, to word process, because the basic skills of opening, saving and altering text are taught well. Teachers share information clearly with pupils and this leads to new knowledge and understanding being used quickly. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils learned how to highlight text and use the overwrite key to improve aspects of their writing. The teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of how to teach ICT. The support from the EAZ with new equipment and in supporting teachers reflects in the confidence of both staff and pupils when using, for examples, computers and the interactive whiteboards. Pupils now have greater access to computers and other types of technology such as digital cameras, which allows teachers to teach the whole range of the ICT curriculum. This is a big improvement since the last inspection when limitations in teachers' knowledge and the range of ICT equipment resulted in pupils not developing their ICT skills quickly enough. There is evidence of ICT being used to support pupils' learning in other subjects such as in Year 1 to create artwork and to improve their knowledge of words, and Year 6 to write accounts of life during World War II. The links teachers make with other subjects sets the use of ICT skills in meaningful situations thus strengthening the pupils' understanding of the benefits of ICT. The pupils enjoy ICT and this shows in the interest they sustain in lessons and the eagerness with which they learn.

Pupils do well by Year 2 in English; the basic skills are taught thoroughly.

6. In Years 1 and 2, teaching effectively focuses upon developing pupils' literacy skills. This is evident in lessons where teachers' explanations to pupils are clear and well paced. This leads to pupils knowing what they are learning and why, making best use of the time to develop their understanding and using their knowledge well to explain what they are doing or have found out.
7. Teachers plan and teach the whole class part of literacy lessons well. They ensure that all pupils take part and set good examples for the pupils to follow. For example, in Year 1 the pupils copied the teacher's use of expression when reading aloud, raising the pitch of their voices when asking questions and responding with louder voices from clues in the text such as 'bellowing'. The eagerness of the pupils to take part reflects the enjoyment they have for reading and the way the teacher has developed in pupils the confidence to have a go for themselves. Pupils learn letter patterns and rules within language well because teaching places a strong importance on using correct terms and explaining their use. For example, in Year 2, the pupils quickly noticed that unusual patterns occur in words such as time, lice and pine. They knew that 'i' and 'e' together makes the sound 'i' as in pie and tie and this sound remains the same but the order of letters changes in pine and time. The way that the teacher used visual clues as well as explanation strengthened the pupils' understanding well. Careful questioning and the interaction of the learning support assistant with the pupils who needed extra help with their work effectively involved all pupils.
8. Activities in the second part of the lessons are also planned carefully to ensure that pupils have the chance to consolidate any new learning or develop their skills further in reading and writing tasks. Pupils settle to their work quickly because they are clear about what they are expected to do. Pupils who need extra help with their work benefit from the learning support assistants' timely interventions and clear explanations. These pupils work well in the smaller group and the learning support assistants have time to meet their needs more effectively. Pupils have some good chances to write for different reasons. Visual prompts provide good opportunities for pupils to observe, comment upon what they see and strengthen their understanding of the sequence of events. For example, when learning to write instructions, pupils in Year 2 watched carefully as a sandwich was prepared. The average attaining pupils quickly picked up on the words that

directed people such as 'first', 'next' and 'now', and used these to write their own instructions, keeping phrases short and to the point. Higher attaining pupils further developed their knowledge of this way of communicating information. They successfully used non-fiction text to pick out key points about, for example, how different types of food cook in the oven. They explained how they noticed words in the text, which helped them to understand the order in which things happened.

9. Teachers are skilful at drawing the lessons to a close by reconfirming with pupils what they have learned and using questioning to check the pupils' level of understanding. In both year groups it was evident that the pupils had achieved what the teachers had set out for them to learn, reflecting the good quality planning and the suitable pace for introducing new work.

Pupils enjoy school, behave very well and build very effective relationships with each other and the staff.

10. Pupils like school very much because they find learning interesting and they enjoy the wide range of activities that are on offer. Boys and girls take part in activities enthusiastically, wanting to show what they can do and being happy to work together. Involvement in discussions, either the whole class or in smaller groups, is good because staff expect pupils to take part. They focus questions in different ways to draw in the more reticent pupils, to challenge the higher attaining and to make sure that lower attaining pupils do not feel left out. Pupils are confident to answer because their efforts are valued. Staff make sure that they acknowledge pupils' achievements. This makes the pupils want to try hard in lessons and do their best. When answers are incorrect, teachers help the pupils to greater understanding, sometimes by asking other pupils if they can help out or reminding pupils of earlier work that may help them. The staff's interactions with the pupils, and the way that they care for them and listen to what they have to say establish very good working relationships between pupils and staff.
11. The emphasis placed upon encouraging pupils to develop the confidence to 'have a go' shows through extremely well for pupils whose first language is not English. These pupils are happy to answer questions or show what they can do because not only the staff celebrate their achievements but so do their classmates.
12. Pupils value praise and feel that teachers give praise fairly and only when it is well deserved. This encourages pupils to be well behaved for the right reasons. Pupils behave very well and this shows in the way they work in lessons and move around the school. Pupils say they are happy and that, most of the time, other pupils are kind, caring and helpful. Pupils make friends easily and look out for one another. They have a strong sense of the difference between right and wrong because staff set very good examples for the pupils to copy. All adults who work in the school are respectful towards the pupils and the pupils respond accordingly. The pupils take part in devising the few but pertinent rules, which reflect the Catholic ethos of the school. This gives pupils a greater understanding of the need to take account of others and to consider the influence of their actions upon their classmates. The school council is proving an effective platform for pupils to put forward their views and in making decisions that affect them.
13. Pupils like taking on responsibilities because they want to please their teachers. Younger pupils enjoy taking the register to the office and older pupils like looking after new children and helping them to settle into school. Pupils now in Year 1 talked warmly about their playtime 'buddies' and how it made them feel special. Younger children in the Reception Year and pupils throughout the school play together very well. They use equipment at playtimes fairly and sensibly. They like to have games to play because it makes good use of break times and gives them the chance to learn new skills. This develops very good relationships between pupils and contributes to the high level of harmony in the school.

The rich and varied curriculum is a significant reason why pupils enjoy school and are interested in their lessons.

14. The school makes most effective use of links with outside bodies to bring in additional opportunities to develop pupils' learning further. This is particularly evident in aspects of physical education, literacy and ICT.
15. The Newcastle EAZ has been a very good source of extra support and the school has made most effective use of the benefits it provides. This has given greater opportunities for pupils to use and develop their ICT skills across the curriculum. The computer suite and equipment such as digital cameras enhance the provision for pupils. On-site technical support, provided by the EAZ and the local education authority, ensures that staff and pupils make optimum use of the equipment because it is kept working correctly and is set up ready for pupils' use. The pupils do well in ICT throughout the school and there has been good progress in developing this area since the time of the last inspection; standards have risen as a result. The full range of the ICT curriculum is now taught. Good quality programs help pupils, for example, to control the movement of models, providing the first stages of computer programming. Links with the education services of a local Premiership football team have also proved beneficial. Pupils have learned how to produce photographs, develop presentations and create pages for a web site. The EAZ has also funded interactive whiteboards in Years 4 to 6. The teachers make good use of this new technology to show pupils how, for example, to calculate totals in mathematics, explain scientific findings and provide an aid to reading in literacy. The pupils are excited by this new technology and enjoy using it to show what they can do and what they understand. The visibility of text and diagrams is very good, helping pupils to consolidate their understanding and ensuring full participation. The contribution to pupils' learning is very good and reflects the pupils' good achievement in ICT throughout the school.
16. The school is keen to involve staff and pupils in government projects that provide additional experiences for pupils. One such project encouraged schools to help children do more than two hours of physical activity each week and not just within the school day. As a result of the project, the school decided to evaluate the effect of physical activity upon pupils' behaviour and their ability to concentrate in lessons. Staff have looked closely at how settled pupils are after lunchtime and mid-morning breaks. The pupils have a range of games and play equipment on offer during break times. The greater activity, involvement and use of energy have had a good effect upon pupils' behaviour. Prior to setting up the project and after it had been running for a year, the relatively few incidents in the behaviour book were analysed. The analysis showed a reduction in the number of incidents occurring on the playground. Pupils themselves find playtimes interesting. There is very good involvement in activities at playtimes and this benefits all the pupils.
17. Funding from Sport England has financed specialist coaching for pupils in basketball. This provides chances for teachers to acquire coaching skills and for pupils to be taught in lessons and clubs after school. Teachers and coaches plan together and this successfully supplements the school's scheme for teaching physical education. The School Sports Co-ordinator Programme provides cover for teachers so that they can be released to work with smaller groups or to undertake audits. The pupils have been involved in hockey festivals, dance classes, judo and rugby. The heightened awareness of sports available in school and locally has had a knock-on effect with parents indicating, in responses to a questionnaire, that their children were more focused upon joining clubs in their spare time and playing constructively after school. There is an extensive range of clubs organised and run by teachers and non-teaching staff, such as football, art, dance and music tuition. The high involvement of about 60 per cent of pupils in the school clubs over the course of the week reflects their interest and enjoyment in the activities the school offers.
18. The school places importance upon the pupils extending their knowledge, for example, of times past by visiting local history sites. This has included Year 3 pupils visiting a Roman fort and sampling Roman food at a banquet and Year 5 pupils visiting the Railway Museum in York. This brings history to life for pupils when they can experience things for themselves. Visitors into school also play an important part in enhancing pupils' learning and helping them to express

their feelings. This includes writers, artists and specialist musicians. Meaningful links between subjects provide some good opportunities for pupils, for example, to use their writing skills. When considering the benefits of exercise, pupils in Year 2 listed these in a poem making good use of descriptive words: "You can skip, you can hide, and in the winter you can slide!" In Year 1, science and geography work is exploited through visits to the local playground to develop a better understanding of forces such as push and pull, and how leisure activities are provided within the locality. Residential visits support pupils' personal development and help to develop a greater understanding of other cultures. For example, a visit to the Alps gives pupils the chance to experience a way of life different to their own.

19. The curriculum supports pupils' learning successfully across subjects, as well as within subjects. The rich and varied curriculum is a significant reason why pupils enjoy school and are interested in their lessons.

Parents are very pleased with the way the school helps their children to mature and improve.

20. Parents are confident that their children are well cared for whilst at St Mark's. They rightly value the efforts made to encourage their children to work hard and do well. Parents feel that the school is quick to act if their children are experiencing any problems. Parents of pupils with special educational needs confirm that the school involves them and keeps them up to date with how well their children are doing. Parents feel reassured by such action.
21. Parents feel involved in their children's education; workshops about how some subjects are taught have proved effective in giving parents the confidence to help their children at home. This has also provided a stimulus for some parents to offer their support in school. The school welcomes this and the new skills that some parents have acquired have given them the confidence to enrol on further training schemes. This has made good use of opportunities from government regeneration funding to benefit people in the local community. Homework is seen as valuable and parents support pupils at home with, for example, their reading and with learning multiplication tables. The level of communication between school and home is good; parents value the weekly newsletter. As a result, parents are kept well informed about how well their children are doing and what is happening in school.
22. Parents find the staff very approachable. They feel that they are listened to and their suggestions valued. This was evident when parental concerns were raised about pupils' wearing trainers to school. The headteacher responded quickly and fairly to the parents' points of view and this was seen as very positive action. Parents recognise that the school offers their children a wide range of learning opportunities. They particularly appreciate the range of sporting events and the efforts the school makes to encourage their children to develop wider interests. They like the way that they are invited to participate in their children's achievements by attending, for example, assemblies and performances. Parents show their gratitude by raising extra funds and attending the coffee mornings and discos organised by the Friends of St Mark's Association. Staff show their support for parents and pupils by helping with fundraising. The money is put to effective use, such as purchasing play equipment for pupils to use at break times.
23. Parents are sure that the school promotes the values and beliefs they hold important very well. They commented upon the way that pupils from St Mark's are noticed for their good behaviour when on trips or out in the locality; parents said, "You can tell these [*St Mark's*] children – they stand out!" The parents appreciate the way that the children are taught to care for others, reflecting their Christian beliefs and the Catholic nature of the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards in writing by the end of Year 6

24. In the 2002 writing tests, results were disappointing. None of the pupils expected to attain level 5 did so and a number who were expected to attain level 4 also did not do as well as expected, yet the same pupils did well in mathematics and science. Closer evaluation of pupils' writing shows that some assessments made before the tests were not always accurate. Marking was sometimes unhelpful in pointing out to pupils how they could improve. For example, a number of pupils were praised for attaining level 5 in pieces of writing, yet this standard was not consistent and there were points that the pupils could have improved upon to consolidate their skills and secure a higher standard of work, for example, in communicating their ideas clearly and using paragraphs consistently.
25. The quality of marking pupils' writing is inconsistent across Years 3 to 6. Some teachers provide useful comments for the lower attaining pupils, which serve to support their learning. However, this is not consistent and not enough is done in some classes to help lower attaining pupils improve their punctuation skills or, for example, the average and higher attaining pupils to choose words to grip the reader's attention. Evaluation of the quality of writing across the year groups shows uneven progress across the ability range. In Year 3, for example, the average attaining pupils do well and in Year 6 it is the lower attaining pupils who do better. However, pupils' progress in writing throughout the juniors is generally satisfactory in comparison to the good progress made, for example, in mathematics and science. Standards of handwriting also show weaknesses in presentation and style from one class to another. The school has extended the chances for pupils to write at length over the past year to provide more practice of writing skills. However, without accurate and informative marking to identify precisely what is weaker by comparison in pupils' writing, this additional practice is of little benefit and skills are not consolidated as well as they should be.
26. The school had started to investigate why standards fell in writing by analysing the pupils' test papers; this is proving useful. At present, the analysis of pupils' written work across the year groups is not wide ranging enough in English to check how well pupils are doing. The samples of work presently collected do not give a true reflection of how teachers, for example, help pupils improve through well-focused comments in marking. These samples also do not help senior managers in identifying if there are any differences in the rate of progress from one class to another to focus support for teaching and learning more effectively.

The provision for children in the Foundation Stage

27. Some of the work planned for children in the Foundation Stage does not take sufficient account of the wide range of ability within the class. Organising and planning the curriculum for the Foundation Stage needs improvement because not enough importance is being given to the steps children need to make before they attain the early learning goals.³ This is of concern considering that the trend in children's attainment is below that expected for their age. The way that some sessions are organised limits the breadth of experience that children need to help them to develop and make progress across the areas of learning⁴. This was particularly evident in the development of children's personal, emotional, social and mathematical skills.
28. Most of the children have not yet developed the ability to sit and listen for extended periods; in whole class lessons and this leads to some inattention and restlessness. For example, in a session on numeracy, children sat for up to 20 minutes as they counted up to ten and identified some of the numerals they knew. This was too long for most of the children's level of

³ Early learning goals form the final stepping-stones and set out what children are expected to know by the end of the Reception Year before starting the National Curriculum in Year 1.

⁴ There are six areas of learning in the Foundation Stage: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematical development; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and, creative development.

concentration. Only the higher attaining children could accurately count up to ten and be fully involved in the activity. Some of the average and most of the lower attaining children struggled to keep up with what was happening and their interest wandered as a result. The structure of the numeracy session too closely resembled the way that numeracy is taught to older pupils and this introductory session was inappropriate for the children. The following group work also restricted the chances for the children to explore, enjoy and learn from the different activities because there was an expectation that they would remain on the same task for the remainder of the session. For the lower attaining children this proved too difficult because they were keen to explore other activities taking place in the classroom. The planning showed that as the week progressed children would have the chance to experience each of the activities but there was no indication how the activities would be adapted to meet the varying needs of the children. Indeed, some of the higher and average attaining children found the tasks they were asked to complete too easy. For example, they completed a matching of objects to numerals task very quickly.

29. Whilst the planning for the session on mathematical development was not effective, better planning and organisation of a literacy session resulted in satisfactory learning for the children. This session provided a much better chance for children to try things out and to work on an activity for as long as they needed. The children were very excited at the prospect. The children's level of concentration was satisfactory and some higher attaining children sustained interest in a game of lotto for most of the lesson. Adults supported children on the taught activities well but did not always intervene in a helpful way at other times, for example, to guide children in solving disputes over taking turns.
30. The children enjoy talking about what they are doing; adults encourage talk when working with small groups and this helps children to have the confidence to initiate conversations. In the literacy session, the range of activities provided some good chances for children to try out writing and develop control of tools and pencils. However, the links between the areas of learning are not exploited well enough and so it is not clear how language is to be developed, for example, through working in the sand, with the play dough or through other areas of learning such as physical development. At present, there is not enough emphasis upon planning ways to developing children's personal development in lessons and how this could be supported through the different activities on offer.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

31. The headteacher, senior managers and governors should:

- 1) Raise standards in writing by:
 - ensuring that teachers use assessments more effectively to identify precisely what pupils need to do to move on more quickly with their learning and that teachers use this information to guide their marking more effectively;
 - ensuring that comments about the quality of pupils' work clearly point out to pupils how they can improve and do even better;
 - ensuring that the evaluation of pupils' writing is wide ranging enough to give a better view of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning across year and ability groups.

- 2) Improve the provision for children in the Foundation Stage by:
 - improving the teacher's knowledge and understanding of this stage of learning;
 - ensuring that planning reflects what the different groups of children are to learn by giving due attention to the stepping stones⁵ to learning;
 - ensuring that sufficient emphasis is given to developing children's personal, social and emotional development to support learning in other areas.

⁵ The steps in children's learning from age three to the end of the Reception Year, which help to guide teachers' planning.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

12

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

10

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	3	4	4	1	0	0
Percentage	0	24	34	34	8	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than eight percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

YR – Y6

Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	192
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	46

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

YR – Y6

Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	21

English as an additional language

No of pupils

Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2
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Pupil mobility in the last school year

No of pupils

Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	13
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	9

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.0
National comparative data	5.6

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 (Year 2)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	7	16	23

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	*	*	*
	Girls	16	16	16
	Total	23	23	23
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	84 (84)	86 (86)	90 (91)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	*	*	*
	Girls	16	16	16
	Total	23	23	23
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	85 (85)	85 (85)	85 (85)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	14	11	25

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	10	11	13
	Girls	10	11	11
	Total	20	22	24
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	80 (93)	88 (87)	96 (100)
	National	75 (75)	73 (71)	86 (87)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	10	11	14
	Girls	11	11	11
	Total	21	22	25
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	84 (90)	88 (87)	100 (100)
	National	73 (72)	74 (74)	82 (82)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

* Because fewer than ten boys took the tests in 2002 the numbers are omitted from the table in line with the governors' reporting arrangements to parents.

Ethnic background of pupils**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	185	0	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	2	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	1	0	0

The table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only. It gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.33
Average class size	27.4

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	135

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/02
	£
Total income	427198
Total expenditure	391767
Expenditure per pupil	2095
Balance brought forward from previous year	13683
Balance carried forward to next year	49114

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	8
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	10
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	192
Number of questionnaires returned	134

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	49	43	2	2	4
My child is making good progress in school.	49	44	2	0	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	51	45	0	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	41	44	6	1	8
The teaching is good.	58	38	0	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37	41	17	2	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	64	32	1	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	74	25	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	44	43	8	1	5
The school is well led and managed.	57	38	0	2	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	51	44	0	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	43	38	11	2	7